



FORTNIGHTLY UPDATE - 03.04.2020

This week the COVID outbreak hit close to home.

The Cheltenham barber who has cut my hair for years was one of those who died last weekend from the virus. Antonakis Petri - or 'Toni' as I knew him - came to the UK in 1960 to join his older brother who had settled in Cheltenham. In recent years he had a barber's shop on Henrietta Street, just a few doors from my office. He was warm, generous, decent and funny. His passing has shocked me very much and I have sent my condolences to his wife, three daughters and grandchildren.

The sole focus for me and my office at this time is saving lives and saving livelihoods. I am in regular contact with Gloucestershire NHS chiefs to discuss issues ranging from the occupancy of local intensive care units, to ventilator capacity (up by around 70 in Cheltenham General over the last week alone).

And then of course there's the PPE supply chain. The sheer amount of protective kit being burnt through is vast, and as local MPs we have been in contact with the Health Secretary about securing Gloucestershire's supply chain – particular for sectors like care homes.

On livelihoods, I'm dealing with a wave of correspondence about the measures to support business. The package rolled out by the Chancellor is arguably the most generous in the world, and allows businesses to furlough their staff on 80% of their pay up to £2,500 a month. It also supports 95% of the self-employed. But inevitably people have specific individual circumstances, and I am advising hundreds of people, as well as lobbying the Treasury for improvements to the scheme.

It's good news that **£24m has been provided by the Government to Cheltenham** to be disbursed to small businesses, and I'm grateful to CBC officers for their hard work to get the money into bank accounts at such speed.

Brits abroad are a real concern too. I am in contact with constituents from Peru to South Africa and am working to get them home as part of the Government's £75m rescue mission. So far we have helped to **bring eleven home, from five different countries** (Spain, New Zealand, Australia, Peru, and a cruise ship in the Pacific).

And then there's the issue of local enforcement of exercise rules, including the closure of the car park on Cleeve Common. It's about common sense, and taking a proportionate approach. I raised this issue in my recent conversation with the Chief Constable. Unless we have quarantine by consent, to coin a phrase, there will be no quarantine at all.

Stay safe everyone. And thank you to all those, from NHS staff, to teachers, supermarket workers and volunteers, who are working so hard for others at this difficult time. It's a grim time, but there are glimmers that the infection rate may be slowing. We will get through this.

Until then, please:

STAY AT HOME, PROTECT THE NHS, SAVE LIVES.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Chalk".

Alex Chalk MP

PS I have collated local information below which I hope will be of use. Do have a scroll through.

In line with data protection regulations, Alex Chalk's office processes constituents' data for policy and casework purposes under the lawful basis of public task. In instances where this lawful basis is not sufficient and explicit consent is required, a member of staff will get in touch with you to establish consent. You can find the full privacy notice on Alex's website [HERE](#)



Covid-19: Gloucestershire Community Help Hub

#GlosCommunity

LOCAL HELP HUB

Gloucestershire councils have come together with the police and health partners to create the hub to **connect local people who need help** with individuals, groups and businesses who can provide the support they need.

The hub includes four forms:

- 'I need help'
- 'I can offer help',
- 'My neighbour needs help'
- 'My business can help'

The information collected will be shared with the relevant local council who will connect people who can help each other, or if appropriate refer individuals to an existing service. Over **2,300 offers of support** have already been made by residents, charities and businesses, with over 1300 people asking for help.

Find it online [HERE](#) or call 01452 583519.

(Lines are open 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri and 9am-4pm Sat-Sun.)

SHIELDING - FOR THOSE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE

The government has drawn up a list of the **1.5 million people** considered to be most at risk from COVID-19, and has contacted them to advise them of the need to be shielded.

Anyone who did not receive a **letter by Sunday 29 March**, or been contacted by their GP, but has an underlying health condition or believes themselves to be vulnerable, should discuss their concerns with their GP or hospital clinician as soon

as possible.

Full guidance on shielding the extremely vulnerable can be found [here](#).

Assistance whilst shielding:

If you can, please **ask family, friends and neighbours to support you** and use online services. If this is not possible, then the public sector, business, charities and the general public are working together to provide assistance.

Please click [here](#) to register for the support that you need. This includes help with food and supplies, and additional care you might need.

Prescriptions:

The government is helping pharmacies to deliver prescriptions. Prescriptions will continue to cover the same length of time as usual. If you do not currently have your prescriptions collected or delivered, you can arrange this by:

1. **Asking someone to pick up your prescription** from the local pharmacy (this is the best option, if possible).
2. **Contacting your pharmacy** to ask them to help you find a volunteer (who will have been ID checked) or deliver it to you.

You may also need to arrange for collection or delivery of hospital specialist medication that is prescribed to you by your hospital care team.

ADVICE FOR BRITISH TRAVELLERS:



LATEST ADVICE FOR BRITS ABROAD:

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented international border closures and other restrictions. British Nationals may be facing a period of lockdown as countries overseas restrict travel without notice. Advice and options vary for each country.

If you're travelling abroad, you should:

1. Contact your airline or travel company now
2. Keep up-to-date with our [travel advice pages](#). We are updating information on returning from the country you're in as quickly as we can
3. For real-time updates, follow our [embassy or high commission's social media](#) for the country you're in

PLANS FOR REPATRIATION

The Foreign Secretary also recently announced that a huge amount of work was going into **arranging repatriation flights for British people** who have been unable to return home.

The government is working in a new partnership with the airline industry to help British people travelling abroad to return to the UK.

Where commercial routes remain feasible airlines, including Virgin, Easyjet, Jet2 and Titan Airways, will be responsible for getting their passengers with pre-booked tickets home. Where commercial routes do not exist, the government will provide up to **£75 million to enable special charter flights** to priority countries to bring back UK residents.

Read more [here](#).

BRINGING CHELTENHAM RESIDENTS HOME

Since last week, Alex's office has been contacted by many Cheltenham residents who are either stuck abroad, or have close family abroad.

So far we have managed to help **bring 11 home**, from **five different countries** (Spain, New Zealand, Australia, Peru, and a cruise ship in the Pacific).

But many more are still out there, and we are working hard with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to get them all home safely, as quickly as possible.

HELPING OUR BUSINESSES:



GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO UPDATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT PACKAGES

The coronavirus outbreak is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. The Government has committed to doing whatever it takes to protect people's jobs and incomes. For the latest information on all of **Government's business support packages**, please click [here](#).

The Chancellor has also outlined additional measures to support firms by **bolstering business interruption loans for small businesses** and announcing a new scheme for larger companies.

- The current loan scheme will be extended so more small businesses can benefit
- Lenders will be banned from requesting personal guarantees on loans under £250,000
- A new scheme is announced to bolster support for larger firms not currently eligible for loans
- For full details see [here](#).

Specific advice for those who are **self-employed** can be found [here](#).

You can also contact the Business Support Line for help, if you are unsure what support you are entitled to. See [here](#).

CHELTENHAM BUSINESSES BENEFITTING

Under the Government's grant scheme for small businesses, **£24.5 million** has been made available for **Cheltenham businesses**.

So far, **228 grant payments totalling £4 million** have been made. And this will continue at pace.

Over 300 Cheltenham businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industry have benefited from the Government's **business rates holiday**.

SUPPORTING OUR NHS:



Gloucestershire Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

GOVERNMENT WRITES OFF £13bn OF HOSPITAL DEBT

The Government is writing off over **£13 billion of historic debt** for over a hundred NHS hospitals. This will free hospitals up to invest in maintaining vital services and longer-term infrastructure improvements.

FREE PARKING FOR NHS STAFF

Gloucestershire County Council has made free parking available to support health and social care workers as they provide vital services to communities during the COVID-19 outbreak.

A free shuttle bus service has also been laid on for staff going to and from the county's two main hospitals.

Read more [here](#).

OTHER LOCAL UPDATES:



[Hampers are now available for families whose children are on Free School Meals]

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Schools which are unable to continue providing meals will be able to support children who receive free school meals with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets. Read more [here](#).

Gloucestershire County Council and their Free School Meals partner, Caterlink, started distributing packed lunches on 23 March, delivering around **2,000 packed lunches a day** to children in the county.

From this week (w/c Monday 30 March) children who receive Free School Meals can get a family **hamper with ten days of food inside as well as children's packed lunches**. The hamper comes with recipe cards so parents can cook with their children during this period of distancing.

Caterlink have received orders for over **1600 hampers** in the first three days of the scheme alone. Belmont School in Cheltenham have already signed up for 78 hampers which will be delivered to families' homes.

If your child is eligible for Free School Meals, please contact their school directly. [Click here for more information.](#)

COUNCIL TAX RELIEF AVAILABLE THROUGH LOCAL AUTHORITY HARDSHIP FUND

The Government has confirmed that the £500 million Hardship Fund will provide council tax relief to vulnerable people and households to help those affected most by coronavirus. **Cheltenham's share of that fund is close to £1 million.** Local authorities have been instructed to act as swiftly as possible in delivering relief to those who need it.

See more [here](#).

CHANGES TO BUS TIMETABLES

Following the government's advice to limit non-essential travel, temporary changes to bus services are being introduced from Monday 30 March.

Find the updated timetable [here](#).

OTHER USEFUL SERVICES

Updated County Council services:

Please find [here](#) a list of GCC's updated services in light of the outbreak.

Looking after your wellbeing:

Please find [here](#) a Gloucestershire County Council's advice and support hub for looking after your wellbeing at this difficult time.

List of local useful services:

You can find a list of local companies who are adapting their services in light of the outbreak, and promoting what they are doing [here](#).

110 things to do while spending time at home:

There are some good suggestions on what you can do during this period of social distancing [here](#).

Cheltenham residents Facebook group offers support:

The Cheltenham Mutual Aid COVID-19 Facebook group is a forum where residents can ask for help or advice for yourself or on behalf of others. Find it [here](#).

GET IN TOUCH

As always, feel free to **email Alex on** alex.chalk.mp@parliament.uk if we can be of assistance at this difficult time. Please note we are receiving an increased volume of correspondence, and have limited resources in a small office, but we will do our best to help you.



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